

## Tense Particles in Ibibio Question-answer Pairs

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### Abstract

The selectivity of tense particles between the Ibibio basic sentences and question-answer pairs manifests a dichotomy. This dichotomy is not without some exceptions. This paper attempts a study of the distribution of Ibibio tense allomorphs between the basic clause structures and the question-answer pairs. Data for this work were collected from Ibibio native speakers through questionnaires and interviews. Analysis of the data reveals that Ibibio basic clause structures select the type (I) tense allomorphs while the question-answer pairs select the type (II) tense allomorphs. Such dichotomy holds when the basic clause has not undergone any transformation and the inquiry is made with the question word moved to the left periphery of the structure. However, if the inquiry is made with the question word at base generated or in-situ position, which is the right periphery of the structure, a free range selectivity principle applies. This free range selectivity principle also applies in polar situations. The paper concludes that generally, movement of arguments from their base generated positions licenses the type (I) tense allomorphs while non-movement of arguments licenses type (II) tense allomorphs. However, a free range selectivity principle applies in question-answer pairs when the inquiry is made with the question word at base generated or in-situ position.

**Keywords:** *Tense Particles, Questions-answer pairs, allomorphs, declarative structures, information structure, Ibibio*

### Introduction

Over the years, a lot of studies have been conducted in an attempt to demystify the complexities of language. Different scholars have worked on different languages with great effort to describe the components inherent in such languages and because language is a vital means of human communication, it is therefore necessary to continue in this quest for knowledge. In the Ibibio language for instance, attempts have been made by many scholars to describe its linguistic components as well as its classification. Essien (1990) and Urua (2000) assert that Ibibio is a Lower Cross Language spoken by about 4 million people of Akwa Ibom State and parts of Cross River State of Nigeria. Williamson (1989) cited in Urua (2000) has classified the Lower Cross as a member of the Benue-Congo family which in turn is a member of the Niger-Congo family, the largest family of languages spoken in Africa. Aside from this classificatory study that identifies Ibibio as a component of the Niger-Congo family, extensive studies have also been conducted regarding its linguistic contents. On this note, let us consider the Ibibio linguistic time. Willie (2014, p.42) remarks that 'no rewarding understanding of linguistic time in any language can be achieved except all the elements that make up the conglomerate of such element is insightfully explored'. This remark is the pivot that provokes the interest of this research into the behaviour of tense particles between information structure of the basic clause and that of question and answer in Ibibio. The notions of tense and question are cross-linguistic phenomena. The only parameterized aspect has always been how they apply in language specific situation.

This paper aims at determining the selectivity of tense particles between basic and derived/focused structures. This means that simple declarative structures shall be studied side by side with the question-answer pairs. It also looks at exceptions to the dichotomy on the selectivity of these tense allomorphs between the two structures in Ibibio language. For purposes of clarity in the communication flow, there is need to provide a brief insight on the concept of focus. This shall be done alongside the discussion of the concept of sentence topic. Topic in this regard is a syntactic position occupied by a constituent whose referent is known and which provides background or contextual knowledge judged by the speaker to be useful to the hearer in comprehending the sentence. On the other hand, focus is a constituent occupying a specific syntactic position marked with higher salience than non-focused constituent in the same sentence. Focus is typically used to mark new information in a sentence while topic marks given or background information. For instance, in a basic structure such as in (1a) below, none of the constituents is focused but a given or background information is provided. In (1b&c) however, the subject and the object are respectively focused.

1(a) Okon ámáàkàá ùdùà.

Okon 3pS.PAST.go market Okon went to the market.

(b) Okon ákékàá ùdùà.

Okon 3pS.PAST.go market It was Okon that went to the market.

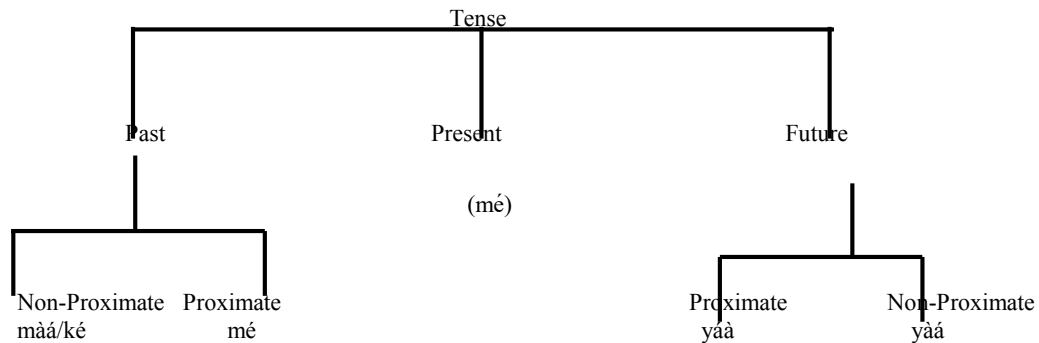
- (c) Okon ákékà ùdùà.  
Okon 3pS.PAST.go market It was market that Okon went.

Here, the speaker uses the questions: “Ànié íkíkàá ùdùà?” (Who went to the market?), to generate (1b) and “Okon ákékàá úke!?” (Where did Okon go?), to generate (1c). In the course of seeking new information from the given therefore, a remarkable constraint regarding the distribution of Ibibio tense particles manifests. This rigidity of focus structures, in the terms of Van Valin (1999), contrasts with the flexibility of the grammatically unconstrained word order of the basic clause as evident in the distribution of Ibibio tense particles exemplified in (1a-c) above. Note that the declarative and the interrogative structures are the type of sentences that carry the full range of tense, aspect and mood distinctions. More generally, it should be clear that the distribution of tense particles in Ibibio cannot be treated in focus structures without reference to the basic clause structures. This is one of the reasons why the Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) model is adopted for this study.

### Ibibio Tense System

Available sources have shown that several authors have worked on Ibibio tense system as well as its question pattern but no insightful study has been carried out on the selectivity of tense particles between the basic structures and the question-answer structures in Ibibio. In essence, Essien (1983, 1990) concludes in agreement with the classical grammarians that Ibibio has a tripartite tense system of past, present and future with affixes corresponding to each of these tenses. Essien (1990, p.78) presents a tree diagram of Ibibio tense system as shown in figure (1) below. Contrary to that view, Oliveira (2004) and Jorge and Oliveira (2009) submit that Ibibio has what Willie and Udoinyang (2012) call bipartite tense system, whereby “tense category in Ibibio is divided into allomorphs types (1/11), related or not to discourse categories” (see figure 2 below adopted from Willie and Udoinyang, 2012, p.245). Willie and Udoinyang (2012, p.246), on their part present what they call a reanalysis of Ibibio tense system as shown in figure (3) below.

Figure (1) A Schematic Representation of Ibibio Tense System According to Essien (1990)



Looking at the tree in figure (1) above, it is obvious that the past has proximate and non-proximate. The non-proximate past has two allomorphs ‘máá/ké’ whose usage is determined by the syntactic and discursive factors implicated in the sentence. Whereas ‘máá’ (i.e type I past tense marker according to Oliveira 2004), according to (Essien, 1990; Urua, 2000; Oliveira, 2004; Jorge and Oliveira, 2009; Willie and Udoinyang, 2012) is used in simple declarative sentences, ‘ké’ (i.e type II past tense marker according to Oliveira 2004), is used in focus constructions. Jorge and Oliveira (2009) further state that ‘ké’ is used in syntax/discourse past.

Aside from *mé*, which is the overt present tense marker, Essien (1990) further affirms that a zero morpheme, an allomorph of *mé* is used to mark present tense in Ibibio. The future tense also has proximate and non-proximate *yáá* and *yáá* (i.e type I future tense allomorphs according to Oliveira 2004), respectively in addition to a syntactically and discursively conditioned allomorph of the non-proximate future *dí* (i.e type II future tense marker according to Oliveira 2004), which is used in negative sentences and sentences with focused elements and future time reference (Willie and Udoinyang, 2012).

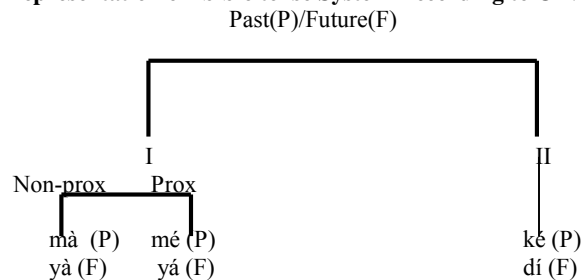
However, it is good to note that there are some exceptions to this constraint. In situations where the wh-word is base generated and in some polar questions, the types (I/II) may be used interchangeably. This is where Role and Reference Grammar which incorporates pragmatics into linguistic analysis is relevant.

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics that studies language use rather than language structure. Therefore, where the listener does not have a full grasp of what the speaker has said, there is a tendency for him/her to re-echo the statement in a question form with appropriate question word at the sentence final position. The essence is to trigger a recast from the speaker whereby the message will be properly re-echoed. When this happens, both types (1/11) can apply interchangeably. This free range selectivity principle cannot hold if the question word that imposes a focus background on the subject argument is at the sentence initial position. This means that when the subject is focused, it is impossible to use the type (1) tense allomorphs. Compare examples (2) and (3) below.

2. (a) Eno áyàákàá ùdùà.  
Eno 3pS.FUT.go market Eno will go to the market.
- (b) Eno áyàákàá úke?/ Eno ádiíkàá úke?  
Eno 3pS.FUT.go where? Where will Eno go?
- (c) Eno áyàákàá ùdùà/Eno ádiíkàá ùdùà.  
Eno 3pS.FUT.go market Eno will go to the market.
3. (a) Eno áyàáama Imo.  
Eno 3pS.FUT.love Imo Eno will love Imo.
- (b) \*Anie áyàáama Imo?  
Who 3pS.FUT.love Imo Who will love Imo?
- (c) ?Eno áyàáama Imo  
Eno 3pS.FUT.love Imo Eno will love Imo.

As seen in (3b&c), it is ungrammatical and unacceptable respectively to use type (1) tense allomorph when the question word is at the sentence initial position. This means that in subject wh-questions, when the subject is focused, the type (1) is blocked within the information structure of question and answer. Since (3b) is ungrammatical, it therefore raises a question on the acceptability of its immediate response as seen in example (3c).

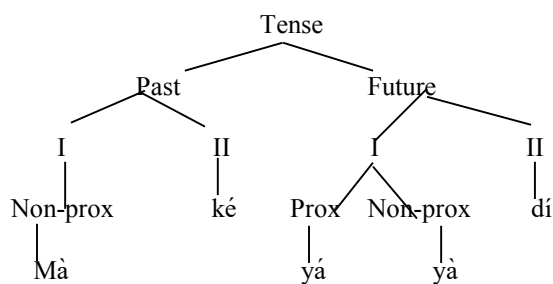
Figure (2): A Schematic Representation of Ibibio tense System According to Oliveira (2004)



A cursory look at this figure (2) reveals that Ibibio is classified according to Willie and Udoinyang (2012) as having bipartite temporal location of past and future against Essien's (1990) tripartite tense system. Willie and Udoinyang (2012) lending support to Jorge and Oliveira (2009) argue on the conceptual ground that what Essien (1990) presents as present tense morpheme tends to be restricted only to stative situational type which according to them do not refer to typical durative situations.

On the contrary, Willie and Udoinyang (2012) assert that *mé* has a present perfect status following Smith's (1997) three-time temporal specification for all sentences. Again, Willie and Udoinyang (2012) deviating from Essien (1990) and Jorge and Oliveira (2009) proximate past tense marked by *mé*, and submit that though this morpheme may have some temporal reference, the primary conceptual interpretation of the morpheme is aspectual. They further present a tree diagram which they call a reanalysis of Ibibio tense system as follows:

Figure (3): A Schematic Representation of Ibibio Tense System According to Willie and Udoinyang (2012)



It is obvious here that the present tense is not represented in the tree diagram. These authors are of the opinion that what Essien (1990) considers as present tense is rather aspect. What then is tense and what is aspect? Tense may be defined as a deictic category that locates an event on the timeline, usually with reference to the time of speaking or moment of speech, aspect is concerned with the internal temporal constituency of one situation (Willie and Udoinyang 2012).

Reacting to Oliveira (2004) and Jorge and Oliveira (2009), concerning what Willie and Udoinyang (2012) call bipartite tense system, Essien (2010, p.92) states: ‘One doesn’t need to go too far to see that Oliveira missed the point’. He explains that the ‘mé’ in ‘méméyàiyá’ (I am beautiful/handsome) ‘cannot by any stretch of imagination be construed as a perfect/perfective marker as claimed by Oliveira (2004)’. Essien (2010, p.92) reaffirms that there are two morphemes in Ibibio which are homonymous. These, according to the author are the present tense marker ‘mé’ in static situations and the immediate past tense marker often combined with perfect/perfective aspect meaning. Essien (2010, p.94-95) has summarised Ibibio tense system as follows:

- (a) that it has a three-way opposition of past, present and future;
- (b) that the past is represented by the allomorph ‘máá’ and ‘ké’ whose occurrence is determined by the presence or absence of categories such as negation, *wh*-question, mood, inceptive and progressive aspects and some form of emphasis or focus;
- (c) that the present tense is represented by ‘mé’ or zero allomorph (∅). In this case, the environment that determines ‘máá’ and ‘yáá/yáà’ determines the occurrence of ‘mé’ while the environment that determines the occurrence of ‘ké and dí’ also conditions the occurrence of the zero allomorph (∅) of the present tense;
- (d) that the future tense is represented by ‘yáá/yáà’ or ‘dí’ whose occurrence is conditioned by the same categories in (b) above.
- (e) that in the distribution equivalence of the allomorphs ‘mé’ : (∅) what ‘máá’ : ‘ké’ and what ‘yáá/yáà’ : ‘dí’.

This paper has not made any distinction as to which is aspectual or tense marker because the primary focus of this work is not on the classification tense and aspect allomorphs in this language. For such distinction, see Essien (1990); Willie and Udoinyang (2012) and others. The intention of this paper therefore, is to bring to bear practical examples that showcase the distribution of these tense allomorphs between the declarative structures and the question-answer counterpart structures. The essence is to describe the exceptions to how the dichotomy applies between the two information structures.

### The Notion of Question

Question is a universal phenomenon. This means that it occurs in all languages of the world in the sense that, in the course of communicating ideas, we request for information using questions. Questions are said to be the same as their corresponding declarative statement in their underlying structures. According to Willie (2013), they differ from their underlying declarative counterparts for having the morpheme (Q) which is motivated by the feature [+Q] situated at the head of the complementiser phrase (CP). The (Q) morpheme represents the question markers and is represented as: “I request that you answer ‘X’, where ‘X’ is the response the speaker expects from the hearer in the range of yes/no, for polar questions and the appropriate statements for *wh*-questions”.

Moreover, Carnie (2007, p.321) classifies questions into two categories namely: yes/no questions and question word questions, whereas, Haegeman (1994, pp.301-4) and Radford (1988, p.246) classify questions into three pairs namely: yes/no and *wh*-questions, echo and non-echo questions and direct and indirect questions. For this study, Haegeman’s and Radford’s first pair: the yes/no questions and the *wh*-questions shall be considered. Essien 1990 classifies Ibibio questions into yes/no and *wh*-question whereas

Willie (2013, p.32), in his work on question formation rules in Ibibio calls wh-questions nominal answer questions (NAQ) following Ikekeonwu (1984), for reason that none of the question words in Ibibio begins with *wh* and that the answer usually given in response to this kind of questions are mostly nominal.

For the purpose of this work, only three question words shall be considered. These question words are: what (*nsòó*), who (*ànié*) and where (*úké!*). For details on other question words and their distribution/or usage, see Essien (1990). The concern of this research, as stated before, is to present a descriptive analysis of how different Ibibio tense allomorphs select different environments in specific situations between declarative structures and question-answer structures. This tense allomorphs selectivity is considered under wh-questions as well as polar questions and their respective responses in Ibibio. By tense allomorph selectivity we mean the tendency for different syntactic structures to collocate with or accept specific tense allomorphs and not others. Also an analysis of the exceptions to the restrictions in the selectivity of the tense allomorphs between the information structure of the basic clause and that of question and answer pairs is presented.

### Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical framework adopted is the Role and Reference Grammar (henceforth, RRG). The RRG is a syntactic framework or a model of grammar that was developed by William A. Folley and Robert Van Valin, Jr. in the 1980s. It incorporates many of the points of view of current functional grammar theories. Major publications on RRG are Foley & Van Valin (1984), Van Valin (1993), Van Valin & La Polla (1997), Van Valin (2005), and Pavey (2010). RRG was inspired by both typological and theoretical concerns. The motivating questions for RRG were, ‘what would a linguistic theory look like if it were based on the analysis of languages with diverse structures, such as Lakhota, Tagalog, Dyirbal and Barai (Papua New Guinea), rather than on the analysis of English?’, and ‘how can the interaction of syntax, semantics and pragmatics in different grammatical systems best be captured and explained?’ These two questions have both theoretical and descriptive contents. On the one hand, they both emphasize the importance of taking account of typologically diverse languages in the formulation of a linguistic theory, and on the other, they indicate that the resulting theory will be one in which semantics and pragmatics play significant roles. Indeed, the initial work in RRG concerned the question of the universality of subject and the cross-linguistic validity of grammatical relations in general (Foley & Van Valin, 1984).

In RRG, the description of a sentence in a particular language is formulated in terms of: (a) its logical (semantic) structure and communicative functions, and (b) the grammatical procedures that are available in the language for the expression of these meanings. Take for instance in Ibibio, the basic clause structures such as examples in (4) below, communicate diverse meanings. This diversity is triggered by the structural contents of the clause. In (4a), the moment of speech corresponds with event time while in (4b&c), there is no such correspondence and therefore, they do not communicate the same meaning. Furthermore, if (b&c) are queried, the internal structure of the questions and their immediate responses differ from those of the basic structures as seen in (5b&c). It shows that the morphological shape of the tense particles of the basic clause structures differ considerably from those of the question-answer pairs. This is where another main feature of RRG, which is the use of lexical decomposition, is used to analyse the tense particles distribution. Such decomposition informs the selection of the question words used for this study which makes it possible to determine the communicative function of the different tense allomorphs. It also shows how such allomorphs are constrained to different environments based on the grammatical procedures of the language and how in pragmatic terms, some exceptions apply to the constraints.

4. (a) Òkón á- kà ùdùà. (present)  
Okon 3pS. go market Okon goes to the market.
- (b) Òkón á- màá- káá ùdùà. (past)  
Okon 3pS- PAST go market Okon goes to the market.
- (c) Òkón á- yàákáá ùdùà. (future)  
Okon 3pS- FUTURE go market Okon will go to the market.
- 5.(a) Ànié í- kí- káá ùdùà? (past) / Ànié ídīiká ùdùà? (future)  
who 3pS- PAST- go market who 3pS.PAST. market Who went to the market? (past)/Who will go to the market? (future)

- (b) Okon á- ké- káá ùdùà. (past)  
Okon 3pS- PAST go market Okon went to the market.
- (c) Okon á- díì- ká ùdùà. (future)  
Okon 3pS- FUTURE go market Okon will go to the market.

The examples in (4-5) show a great deal of constraints as shall be presented in subsequent sections. RRG is justifiable for this work since it draws inspiration from both theoretical and descriptive point of view. It was developed as an improvement upon Vendler's (1967) theory of Aktionsart classification of verbs with state and activity as basic. In Ndimele's (2007) viewpoint, verbs are semantically classified into stative and dynamic where the dynamic class is further divided into action and event verbs. By Aktionsart it is meant inherent temporal property of verbs which is the core of this study with regard to the distribution of tense allomorphs in Ibibio language. In the course of this study therefore, the three sub-groups of verbs (state, action and event) are considered in data presentation.

### Research Methodology

Apart from written sources, sets of structured questionnaires that consisted of declarative sentences were constructed in the English language. The questionnaires were administered to ten respondents who were literate speakers of the Ibibio language and the research task was for them to translate the declarative sentences from English to Ibibio. Ten other literate speakers were assigned the task of generating questions from the respective declarative structures using question words such as 'where', 'who' and 'what', as applicable, while another ten were assigned the task of providing appropriate responses to the generated questions. Polar questions and their responses were also generated through this medium. Respondents for this exercise were randomly selected from Uyo and Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Areas.

In spite of personal idiosyncrasy, a common ground was established regarding the well-formedness and the correctness of the translations. The translated versions of the template were read out to another ten non-literate native speakers who are vested in the language to ascertain the grammaticality and acceptability of the basic and the derived forms. In the course of the study, it was observed that Ibibio has diverse tense allomorphs. These allomorphs are constrained to specific environments. Based on native speakers' intuition, haphazard substitution of the allomorphs between basic and derived constructions manifests ungrammaticality. In that case, some constructions that were syntactically well-formed were judged to be semantically unacceptable. A cursory look therefore, at the two information structures reveals the environment which each of the respective tense allomorphs can occur. Some exceptions to this dichotomy were also observed, as shall be seen in the following sub-section that deals on data presentation and analysis.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, data is presented and analysed in a way that shows the distribution of tense markers between the basic clause and the derived question-answer pairs in Ibibio. Considering the fact that verbs are semantically classified into state and activity with the latter being further classified into event and action verbs, as referred in the literature (Vendler1967, Ndimele2007), our presentation and analysis is anchored on these three types of verb as they inflect for tense between the basic clause and the question-answer pairs. According to Ndimele (2007), stative verbs express the state of affairs of the entity denoted by the verb without any overt action. Event verbs are verbs which may not necessarily express any kind of activity, but a kind of situation that spreads over a certain time span without limitation. Action verbs, on the other hand, are those which involve conscious and goal-oriented activity of some participant individual. Let us now observe how these different sub-groups of verb inflect for tense in Ibibio.

### Tense Formation with Event verb

Event verbs as stated above are verbs which may not necessarily express any kind of activity, but a kind of situation that spreads over a certain time span without limitation. The essence here is to check if there is any peculiar way the tense markers can apply in the different sub-groups of verb in basic and derived clause structures. A basic clause structure, in the sense of this paper, refers to simple declarative sentences that have not undergone any kind of transformation while the derived forms are those that have undergone some kind of transformation. In this section, data is presented with this idea in mind. This is with a view to observe the distribution of tense particles in their respective time reference.

Note that the question word *ànié* “who” has [+HUMAN] value while the question word *̀̀sòó* “what” has [-HUMAN] value. A detailed work on how these question words are used is carried out in Essien (1990) as referred in the literature. The concern here is the output questions and responses generated from the input declarative counterparts through which the distributions of the tense particles are displayed. Here, we shall consider the verb *kpá* (die) in its present form as in (6) below:

6. (a) *Ékpó á- kpa*  
ekpo 3SG die Ekpo dies/ Ekpo is dead.
- (b) *̀̀Anié í- kpá?*  
Who 3SG die Who dies / Who is dead?
- (c) *Ékpó á- kpá.*  
Ekpo 3SG die Ekpo dies / Ekpo is dead.

Since the examples in (6) are in the present tense form, it is noticeable that the tense morpheme is not visible. The tense marker in this context is implied or what is considered in Essien (1990) as zero (0) present tense marker. The “*mé*” counterpart, as in “*Mméyàiyá.*”, (I am beautiful/ handsome.), which is considered by many Ibibio language scholars to have aspectual undertone, seems to occur mostly with the first person pronoun and in stative situation type.

Note that every past is a reflection of the present and every present hopes for the future. Now, the paper discusses the past tense and the future tense in relation with the question words selected above. Let us reconsider the same examples in (6) as (7) for past tense in order to showcase the distribution of the tense markers.

7. (a) *Ékpó á- mää- kpa*  
ekpo 3SG.PAST.die Ekpo was dead/Ekpo died.
- (b) *̀̀Anié í- kí- kpa!?*  
Who 3SG.PAST.die Who died?
- (c) *Ékpó á- ké- kpa*  
ekpo 3SG.PAST.die It was Ekpo that died.
- (d) *\*̀̀Anié á- mää- kpa?*  
Who 3SG.PAST.die Who died?
- (e) *?Ékpó á- mää- kpa*  
ekpo 3SG.PAST.die Ekpo died.

Note that since most wh-question words undergo some kind of movement from their base generated position to the sentence initial positions, it can be said that all questions generated from a declarative sentence counterpart are given [+FOCUS] value. The corresponding responses to such questions are also given [+FOCUS] while their declarative sentence counterparts are given [-FOCUS] value. This is why the use of ‘*má*’ in the information structure of question and answer is blocked, hence, the reason for the syntactically ill-formed structure in (7d) and the semantically unacceptable structure in (7e).

Nevertheless, it is good to note here that when the subject of a basic structure is focused, there may be no case of movement. On the other hand, the object can be focused at in-situ position or moved to a position of higher prominence. Notice that with subject wh-questions, the type (1) tense allomorphs are blocked, but the reverse is the case with the object wh-question when movement is not involved as shall be seen presently with a verb of two place valence position. Note also that event verbs seem to be intransitives as such do not take objects, apart from the fact that they take cognate objects in Ibibio. Let us consider the action verb with two place valence position.

### Tense Formation with Action Verb

Action verbs as said earlier are those verbs which involve conscious activities of some participant individuals. Here, a verb that is capable of assigning semantic roles to two arguments is considered. Let us look at a verb like *tèm* “cook”. Henceforth, only past and future constructions shall be considered because they are consistently marked in the in the language. Emphasis here is to focus both external and internal arguments with the question words *ànié* “who” and *̀̀sòó* “what” as the case may be, to describe the constraints as well as exceptions on the tense allomorphs distribution. Future constructions shall be considered in this section.

8. (a) Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi.  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.
- (b) Ànié ídíitém àdèèsi?  
who 3SG.FUT.cook rice Who will cook rice
- (c) Ènò ádíitém àdèèsi  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.
- (d) \*Ànié áyàátèm àdèèsi?  
who 3SG.FUT.cook rice Who will cook rice?
- (e) ?Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.

In the course of this study, it has been observed that when the question word replaces the subject of a basic clause, there is a dichotomy in the distribution of the tense allomorphs between the two information structures as evident in examples (8). This is why example (8d,e) generated with free range selectivity principle is ungrammatical. What is meant by free range selectivity is a situation where both types (I/II) tense allomorphs can be used in both information structures without any note of ungrammaticality.

When a question word replaces the object and maintains its base generated position, both types (1/11) of the tense allomorphs can be selected in both information structures as seen in example (9).

9. (a) Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi.  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.
- (b) Ènò ádíitém sòó?/ Ènò áyàátèm sòó?  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook what What will Eno cook?
- (c) Ènò ádíitém àdèèsi./ Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi.  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.

However, if the object is focused and moved to sentence initial position, the free range selectivity of the tense allomorphs is blocked between the two information structures. This is why examples (10b,c) are grammatical while (10d,e) are ungrammatical.

10. (a) Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi.  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.
- (b) Ñsòó ké Ènò ádíitém?  
What that Eno 3SG.FUT.cook What will Eno cook?
- (c) Ènò ádíitém àdèèsi.  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.
- (d) \*Ñsòó ké Ènò áyàátèm?  
What that Eno 3SG.FUT.cook What will Eno cook?
- (e) ?Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi.  
Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice Eno will cook rice.

At this point, we can submit that when the subject is in focus, the type (I) of the tense allomorph is blocked within the information structure of question and answer. Similarly, when the object is focused and moved to sentence initial position, the type (I) is also blocked. On the other hand, when the object is focused in-situ, there is no constraint for both types (I/II) of the tense allomorphs in both information structures.

From here, we can have a clear view of the distribution of the tense allomorphs in both information structures. Nevertheless, another diagnostic test will still be carried out with a stative verb as well as within yes/no question-answer pairs to ascertain more of the constraints and exceptions in the distribution of Ibibio tense allomorphs.



### Tense Formation with Stative Verb

As stated above, stative verbs express the state of affairs of the entity denoted by the verb without any overt action. The verb *bíét* “resemble” does not express any overt action and is therefore, selected for study in this sub-section. The verb also has a two place valence position. Two arguments of [+HUMAN] value are selected for both subject and object position. This is with a bit to test the functionality of *ànié* “who” at both positions. Here, we shall consider only past constructions.

11. (a) *Ákpán ámàábiét Ùdó.*  
akpan 3SG. PAST.resemble udo Akpan resembled Udo.
- (b) *Ànié ikíbiét Ùdó?*  
Who 3SG.PAST.resemble udo Who resembled Udo?
- (c) *Ákpán ákébiét Ùdó.*  
akpan 3SG.PAST.resemble udo It is Akpan that resembled Udo.
- (d) *\*Ànié ámàábiét Ùdó?*  
Who 3SG.PAST.resemble udo Who resembled Udo?
- (e) *?Ákpán ámàábiét Ùdó.*  
akpan 3SG.PAST.resemble udo Akpan resembled Udo.
12. (a) *Ákpán ámàábiét Ùdó.*  
akpan 3SG.PAST.resemble udo Akpan resembled Udo.
- (b) *Ákpán ámàábiét ànié?/ Ákpán ákébiét ànié?*  
Who 3SG.PAST.resemble who Who did Akpan resemble?
- (c) *Ákpán ámàábiét Ùdó./Ákpán ákébiét Ùdó.*  
akpan 3SG.PAST.resemble udo Akpan resembled Udo.
13. (a) *Ákpán ámàábiét Ùdó.*  
akpan 3SG. PAST.resemble udo Akpan resembled Udo.
- (b) *Ànié ké Ákpán ákébiét?*  
Who that akpan 3SG.PAST.resemble Who did Akpan resemble?
- (c) *Ákpán ákébiét Ùdó.*  
akpan 3SG.PAST.resemble udo It was Akpan that resembled Udo.
- (d) *\*Ànié ké Akpan ámàábiét?*  
Who that akpan 3SG.PAST.resemble Who did Akpan resemble?
- (e) *?Akpan ámàábiét Udo.*  
akpan 3SG. PAST.resemble udo Akpan resembled Udo.

The same conditioning that apply with action verbs also apply with stative verbs. When the subject is in focus, the type (I) of the tense allomorph is blocked within the information structure of question and answer. Similarly, when the object is focused and moved to sentence initial position, the type (I) is also blocked. On the other hand, when the object is focused in-situ, there is no constraint for both types (I/II) of the tense allomorphs in both information structures. In what follows, we shall carry out this tense allomorph distribution test with polar question-answer pairs.

### Tense Particles in Polar Question-Answer Pairs

Polar questions are questions that require a yes/no for an answer. It sometimes may require optional re-echoing of the question in a statement form for an answer as shown in examples (14) and (15) below.

14. (a) *Énò ámàátèm àdèèsi. / Énò áyáátèm àdèèsi.*  
Eno 3SG.PAST.cook rice Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice  
*Eno cooked rice. Eno will cook rice.*

- (b) Ènò àmàátèm àdèèsi? / Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi?  
 Eno 3SG.PAST.cook rice? Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice?  
 Did Eno cook rice? Will Eno cook rice?
- (c) Ih/Eh, Ènò àmàátèm àdèèsi. Ih/Eh, Ènò áyàátèm àdèèsi.  
 Yes, Eno 3SG.PAST.cook rice. Yes, Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice.  
 Yes, Eno cooked rice. Yes, Eno will cook rice.
15. (a) Ènò ákétèm àdèèsi. / Ènò ádiitèm àdèèsi.  
 Eno 3SG.PAST.cook rice Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice  
 It was Eno that cooked rice. It is Eno that will cook rice.
- (b) Ènò ákétèm àdèèsi?. / Ènò ádiitèm àdèèsi?  
 Eno 3SG.PAST.cook rice? Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice?  
 Was it Eno that cooked rice? Is it Eno that will cook rice?
- (c) Ih/Eh, Ènò ákétèm àdèèsi. / Ih/Eh, Ènò ádiitèm àdèèsi.  
 Eno 3SG.PAST.cook rice Yes, Eno 3SG.FUT.cook rice  
 It was Eno that cooked rice. Yes, It is Eno that will cook rice.

Note that the type (I) tense allomorphs are used in (14a) for past and future tenses respectively since they are non-focused structures generated from the focused (14b,c) structures. (15a,b,c) are all focused structures, hence, the choice of type (II) tense allomorphs for past and future respectively. It can be observed here that there is no constraint on the selectivity of the tense allomorphs between the information structure of the basic clause and that of the question and answer. What this means is that the dichotomy between the type (I) tense allomorphs constraint on the information structure of the basic clause and the type (II) tense allomorphs constraint on the information structure of question and answer pairs does not hold in polar question.

This is because in polar questions, the inquiry is made as a direct copy of the statement in a question form without using any question word. The response to the question is as well given with a yes/no answer or a direct repetition of the statement. This is why all the examples in (14) select the type (I) tense allomorphs because the statement counterparts select the same and vice versa for the examples in (15).

So, it can be seen that there is no dichotomy in the selection of the tense allomorphs between the information structure of the basic clause and that of the question and answer in affirmative polar construction. Similarly, this dichotomy does not hold in wh-question when the question word substitutes the object argument and the argument so substituted by the question word does not move from its base generated position to the sentence initial position.

In negative polar constructions, a spectacular shift is noticed as in example (16). Here, the question pairs-up with the basic clause counterpart while the dichotomy line comes between the new pair and the response counterpart. Note also that it is the erroneous substitution of the object argument in (16b) that triggers the negative construction in (16c).

16. (a) Èkèm àmàákàá ìnyàñ.  
 Ekem 3SG.PAST.go river Ekem went to the river.
- (b) Èkèm àmàákàá ìdàñ?  
 Ekem 3SG.PAST.go copulate Did Ekem go to copulate?
- (c) Iyo, Èkèm ákéákà ìnyàñ.  
 No, Ekem 3SG.PAST.go river No, Ekem went to the river.

Apart from the exceptions identified, the type (1) tense allomorphs are basically constrained to the information structure of the basic clause while the type (11) tense allomorphs are constrained to the information structure of the question and answer.

### Discussion of Findings

So far we have been able to explore the selectivity of tense markers in Ibibio between the information structure of the basic clause and that of question and answer. In the study, question-answer pairs were analysed side by side with the basic clause counterparts. Questions, as referred in the literature, (Willie, 2013,



In spite of various studies carried out on Ibibio tense system, it is obvious that more studies still have to be conducted. It is on this ground that this paper studied the distribution of tense allomorphs in Ibibio. Suffice it to say that using input (declarative) structures side by side with the output (question and response) counterparts to study the constraints and exceptions in the distribution of Ibibio tense allomorphs has been very insightful. The paper has identified movement to positions of higher salience as one of the major factors that determines the distribution of Ibibio tense allomorphs.

In focus construction, for instance, it is not all the focused constituents that undergo movement to the position of higher salience like the sentence initial position. Therefore, even though a constituent is focused, if the constituent so focused does not move to sentence initial position, the free range selectivity principle applies. It is a common knowledge that in an SVO language typology, such as English and Ibibio, the subject of a sentence is already at the position of higher salience. Therefore, when a subject is focused, no movement is required before the tense allomorph selectivity constraint applies but when the object is in focus, movement is required before the tense allomorph selectivity constraint can apply. More generally, it should be clear that the behavior of tense particles in Ibibio cannot be analyzed in focused and derived structures without making reference to the basic clause structures. The reason is that the derived structures are generated from the basic clause counterparts. This paper therefore, concludes following Willie's (2014, p.42) remarks that 'no rewarding understanding of linguistic time in any language can be achieved except all the elements that make up the conglomerate of such linguistics time is insightfully explored'. So, there is need for more insightful study into this aspect of the Ibibio language.

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